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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007675

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA OFFICIAL ON IRAN: REMAIN FIRM, DON'T ISOLATE, AND KEEP DOOR TO DIALOGUE OPEN

REF: A. PARIS 7597

[1](#)B. PARIS 7398

[1](#)C. STATE 199225

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: MFA DAS-equivalent for Iran/Iraq Arabian Gulf Affairs Antoine Sivan assessed the Ahmadi-Nejad government as weakened by internal debate within Iran and lacking competence and experience, during a recent discussion with us. Sivan speculated that Ahmadi-Nejad's recent statements on Israel were intended to curry domestic support, and had attracted criticism from within the Iranian government, in addition to international condemnation. While Sivan affirmed the need for the international community to remain firm and vigilant with respect to Iran, he warned that further isolation of Iran could galvanize Iranian public support for hard-liners, as well as result in a dangerous GOI backlash. Although Sivan expressed personal doubts over immediate referral of Iran to the UNSC, we do not see him as a player on the Iran EU-3 issue. In response to our raising a long list of Iranian government transgressions, Sivan asserted that the GoF regularly and firmly raised human rights cases with the Iranian government. We see Sivan's comments as indicative of the MFA's general cautionary approach and similar to MFA arguments against further isolation of Syria. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (C) MFA DAS-equivalent Antoine Sivan briefly addressed Iran developments with poloff during a November 4, Iraq-focused discussion (ref a). Asked to assess the increasingly extremist policy line taken by the Ahmadi-Nejad government, Sivan described the Ahmadi-Nejad government as incompetent in many respects and lacking governing experience. In Sivan's view, "no one" had expected Ahmadi-Nejad's election, which he viewed as the result of populist dissatisfaction with the ruling class and hard-line support for the former Tehran mayor's candidacy. Sivan added that there appeared to be a great internal debate and shifting political alliances within Iran, which, while not yet at the level of an internal crisis, had weakened the Ahmadi-Nejad government, resulting in its "feverish" behavior. Commenting on the recent global recall of Iranian ambassadors, including Ambassador to France Sadegh Kharazi, Sivan cited Kharazi as emblematic of the debate going on within Iran, noting that the Iranian ambassador had, in recent encounters with the GoF, hinted at his lack of enthusiasm for the points his capital had instructed him to deliver.

[1](#)3. (C) Sivan dismissed Ahmadi-Nejad's recent statements on Israel as "stupid" and worthy of international condemnation. At the same time, he speculated that the Iranian president's remarks were largely for domestic Iranian consumption, in order to play to his ultra-nationalist base and attract greater public support, particularly from conservative students hostile toward Israel. Sivan added that many within Iran, including figures within the government (NFI), had denounced Ahmadi-Nejad's remarks for further isolating Iran. By concentrating all power in the hands of the ultra-religious, the Iranian government was being confronted by its own contradictions and showing that it was ill-suited to adapt to current realities. In Sivan's view, we should let this internal Iranian debate run its course and let Iranians seek changes from inside.

[1](#)4. (C) Sivan concluded that the international community, while remaining firm and vigilant with respect to Iranian behavior, should not seek increased isolation of Iran, which he described as the worst solution and likely to galvanize support for Ahmadi-Nejad and his ultra-nationalist base. The more Iran became isolated, the more dangerous it would become; for this reason, he reasoned, the international community must keep the door of dialogue open to Tehran. In this context, Sivan said he was personally unsure whether immediate referral to the Security Council on the nuclear issue was a good idea, as it could further rally domestic support for the GOI.

[1](#)5. (C) Poloff questioned Sivan's reasoning, and asserted that Iran's behavior across the board -- on the nuclear file, supporting terrorism, threatening Israel's existence, and suppressing its people -- was isolating it from the

international community, not the other way around. Poloff cited President Chirac's public condemnation of Ahmadi-Nejad's Israel remarks, in which the French president described Iran as at risk of "banishing" itself from the international community (ref b). Sivan conceded these points, and said that there were ultra-conservatives within Iran who wanted a confrontation with the West to boost their own domestic standing, though most Iranians didn't want this option. For this reason, the EU-3 would work to keep the door to dialogue open, without losing face, and would seek to bring Iran back in compliance with the Paris agreement, in close cooperation with the U.S., Russia and others. He asserted further that the GoF was remaining firm with Iran on human rights, and had delivered periodic, tough messages to the GOI on prisoner cases, including Akbar Ganji. He added that the GoF had received appeals from Iranian human rights activists, including Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, urging France and other European governments not to let Iranian prisoners of conscience be forgotten by the West.

16. (C) Comment: We note that Sivan is not a leading player on the Iran EU-3 issue, which is handled by the MFA Strategic Affairs Directorate and MFA Political Director Laboulaye. His warnings of not isolating Iran are typical of the French MFA's cautionary mindset in general, and are similar to MFA arguments against further isolation of Syria. We also note that the GoF has continued to publicly condemn the Ahmadi-Nejad Israel remarks, most recently during a November 3 National Assembly appearance by FM Douste-Blazy, in which he also reaffirmed that Iran must suspend its nuclear activities or face referral to the UNSC. End comment. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at: <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm> fm Stapleton